

the curious experience of Henry James, from around the root of whose tongue a doctor had to remove a long, entangling string bean, helps explain the laboriousness of those sentences that the great novelist dictated to his stenographer during his final, seemingly tongue-tied phase?

Merely browse in Hall's rich book, picking out the little hilarities, and you may wonder how such a nitwitted nationful of vain, jealous, posturing rummies possibly could have written American Literature. Read it through slowly, however, and you become convinced that our national classics are the work of human beings at least sporadically clever, decent, and wise. Playing chess with the Duchess of Bourbon, Benjamin Franklin captured her king. "Ah," said the French noblewoman, "we do not take kings so." "We do in America," Franklin replied. □

KIPLING AND CONRAD: The Colonial Fiction, by John A. McClure. Harvard University Press, 182 pp., \$16.50.

Lord Kim

EDWARD W. SAID

JOHAN McCLURE'S STUDY IS the first devoted to Kipling and Conrad as writers of "colonial fiction." Both men, Conrad especially, have been the beneficiaries of a sizable scholarly industry; yet, having noted that until now no one has focused on the connection between the two writers and empire, McClure does not pause to ask why. This is by no means to say that McClure's book is superficial and uninteresting. It is neither, but its limits and even its considerable strengths say as much about contemporary literary studies in the university as they do about the book's subject.

The deprivations of Kipling's early years as an Anglo-Indian foster child lodged with a provincial family in England, the lingering inferiority he continued to feel, the clear-cut lines of domination and submission provided

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him in early maturity by British India—these are deftly characterized by McClure. In a series of brief chapters on Kipling's fiction, he then proceeds through a set of stories and novels, outlining the attitudes and the changes in attitude to be found there. At first Kipling uses the Indian setting to embody his own afflictions, his "imprinted fears of isolation and inadequacy," but in time these are resolved by sublimating them in the hierarchies of imperial rule. Inferior people are to be kept in their places, their "nightmares . . . to be nurtured and employed as internalized allies of social control." Higher up in the social hierarchy enforced by colonial rule are the administrators, officers, missionaries, journalists, and sometime writers for whom India's rich native treasures are a temptation on the one hand, and on the other a trap and a warning of threatened loss of position.

As he grew older Kipling transformed the impasse—as McClure shows quite brilliantly and economically—by creating the apparently benign but "disinfected" community portrayed in *The Jungle Book, Kim, Stalky & Co.*, and *Captains Courageous*, each of which, by the way, contains a much revised and idealized portrait of Kipling's miserable school years at the United Services College. In his analysis of the two most acclaimed of these works, McClure reveals Kipling's formula for secure imperial domination—how, through a carefully scheduled education, the India-born European (Mowgli and Kim) acquires skill in ruling a precisely ordered local *imperium*—and shows that for all its serenity Kim's India is an antiliberal utopia, a colony contaminated neither by sentiments of independence nor by fears of abandonment by the metropolitan power.

McClure says about this prefiguring of the Algerian *pied noir* and white Rhodesian position, "Part of this transformation [of India] is legitimate, for Kipling's theme is that to a country-born-and-bred European India is a familiar home, not a foreign prison. But much of the transformation involves a gigantic act of imaginative disinfection. Kipling simply wipes out, erases from his picture of India, all those groups and forces that were making life there in his time difficult for any imperialist, country-born or not. . . . [Thus] all of Kim's enemies come from beyond the border of British India. Within these borders, all is amity. Such was not the case, of course. . . ."

"Of course" is hardly the correct

phrase here. Read even a supposedly "political" and progressive critic like Irving Howe on *Kim*, and you would not suspect that the novel was about a colony seething with conflict and contradictions, portrayed instead as serenely playing "the Great Game." For Howe, Kipling's novel is essentially about the pleasures of "being," which is an index of how successful Kipling's fantasy of boyhood life is with professional critics. Unlike McClure, who correctly interprets the novel's ultimate softness as an act of the deepest sort of wish-fulfillment, Howe admits to Kipling's lack of rigor but suggests without a trace of irony that Kipling's political failure lies in not portraying India's poverty! Imperialism, colonial rule, racial discrimi-



nation, and economic exploitation do not get the merest nod of recognition from Howe, who has adopted as his current literary guide to the Third World V. S. Naipaul, Kipling's heir in lamenting the past glories of colonization.

But if McClure's successful account of Kipling gets its strength from an honest personal awareness of the larger imperial setting within which Kipling worked, his view of Conrad is, I think, flawed by that too limited and naive awareness. True, Conrad traveled the British East and even grew up in parts of Eastern Europe colonized by the Polish landowning minority to which his family belonged. Nevertheless, Conrad's mind was more complex than Kipling's and his art much subtler, so much so that "colonial fiction" simply cannot cover what goes on in his extraordinarily difficult narratives. Kipling used fiction to ease the pain of his childhood memories and to make imperial British India an insulated home for uninterrupted repose and uninhibited, albeit decorous, aggression (against lower forms of life, natives especially). Fiction and biogra-

phy complement each other perfectly in Kipling's case. For Conrad, however, fiction was stimulated only at the outset by biography, with the result that Conrad's art far exceeded the simple anecdotal data of his life. His was a restless skeptical mind with a distinctly pioneering cast; he used his fiction to explore realms of experience and thought only hinted at by his actual past or by a factual knowledge of colonialism.

An example of Conrad's prescience is confirmed by Jean Stengers's recent study of Leopold II of the Belgians as an imperialist, collected in Roger Owen's and Bob Sutcliffe's *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (1972). Most of the private papers and diaries used by Stengers (who does not seem to be familiar with Conrad's work) could not have been known to Conrad when he wrote *Heart of Darkness*, yet there is an uncanny spiritual and intellectual resemblance between Kurtz and Leopold as human beings. Kurtz's ambition, his strange combination of greed and grandiose altruism, his moral refinement, and his

unrestrained private projections for the Congo—these have remarkable, almost exact verbal parallels in Leopold. Neither of the two men was a strict economic imperialist, and Conrad's achievement was to have put into words so accurately the kind of mentality that an age of imperialism might have produced, and in Leopold's case actually did produce, unknown to Conrad. To reduce Conrad's achievement, as McClure does, simply to an accurate *description* of imperialism is to miss the enormous force of Conrad's creation of the imperialist mind, a creation proving Wilde's dictum that reality imitates art.

CONRAD'S EARLY AND LEAST ambitious fiction—*Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and *The Rescue*—comes the closest in form and substance to Kipling's work. As a result, McClure's analysis of these works is sound. Beginning with *Lord Jim*, however, he lets Conrad slip away from him almost completely. The chapters on *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo* are written as if Conrad were a slightly morbid version of Kipling, and by the end of the book, when McClure has very little to say about Conrad except that he was a conservative anti-imperialist, an air of despondent failure hangs over McClure's cursory writing.

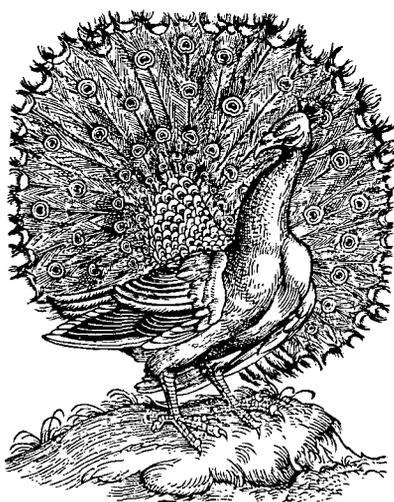
It is not only that he has absolutely nothing to say about Conrad's astonishing formal innovations in narrative technique, or that he ignores all analyses of Conrad's nihilism, his radical epistemological explorations, and his dark cosmological broodings, or that he continues to suggest that the novels are only a passive reflection of historical reality. What is dismaying is his assumption that Conrad's novels form a self-contained entity usable without necessary reference to the complex realities of colonialism and imperialism. In this naiveté McClure shares an assumption of his field and mine, academic literary scholarship—an assumption that good, sensitive readings of literature can stand on their own. Why? Because *literature* is different from *politics* even when, irony of ironies, the critic deals with an essentially political literature.

What I am talking about, then, is a set of self-imposed limits that cripples criticism to an unacceptable degree. On the simplest level in McClure's case it means not seeming to know the slightest thing about the vast literature on imperialism and colonialism. This is not a matter of bibliographical pedantry. Beyond its biographical resonance, was

Kipling's colonial fiction an illustration of the reality? Did it go against most other colonial fiction? Was it useful in maintaining or diminishing the empire? These are questions one cannot ask, let alone answer, unless one has studied the material in D. K. Fieldhouse's work on the colonial empires, V. G. Kiernan's *Lords of Human Kind*, A. P. Thornton's *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies*, or such documents as John Hobson's book on imperialism. Yet literary critics avoid such works, to say nothing of the works of Frantz Fanon, Immanuel Wallerstein, Gunder Frank, and Harry Magdoff, because they believe that students of literature are accredited to study literature, and not politics, economics, or history. This absolute division of labor has kept critics from studying Kipling and Conrad as writers of colonial fiction, and it has made McClure's a partial treatment of the subject. No wonder, then, that McClure does not stop to inquire why until now no book has been written on the relationship between colonialism and high literature.

For underneath that unexplored relationship is a set of questions dogging academic scholarship now as it must have dogged the novelists then: To what extent is fiction during an imperial era part of imperialism itself? How is it possible to write novels about colonialism (or to write a literary history of colonialism) without at the same time participating in colonialism? Is culture innocent of so massive a system of domination and profit, or is it really an integral aspect of that system, making its indecent cruelties, its monumental plunder and oppression, its deeply inhuman treatment of other human beings, appear to be palatable, normal, and "realistic"? These questions seem like the crucial ones to me. Even if no ready answers for them are at hand, one can permit oneself retrospective misgivings about colonialism without at the same time remaining "just" a careful close reader of purely literary texts. This is something McClure does not seem to have considered, and his book shows it. But until the cloistered institutions of literary study are opened to the (usually) nasty world that made them possible in the first place, the confining walls will allow intelligent young critics to go on separating, laundering, and prettifying both realms. So long as the two realms live off each other secretly, then more purely literary and nonpolitical books will be written, and colonialism will continue to seem merely a good subject for a modest essay. □

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New York film festival

STEPHEN HARVEY

THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL has always possessed a particular cachet that no rival American event can quite match. Part of its distinction, of course, is just an accident of geography and civic boosterism, since everyone who lives and works between SoHo and 96th Street (including the press) knows that this is the artistic hub of the globe and any film festival programmed here must be the apex of its kind. Just as important is the Festival Committee's much-vaunted reputation for choosiness. New York's annual film buffet never indulges in the excesses associated with, say, Los Angeles's Filmex, which unspools practically every reel of film exposed to light from Hong Kong to the Ivory Coast during the preceding calendar year. At Lincoln Center, just over two dozen programs, retrospectives included, are assembled each year, leading to the widespread assumption that these and only these are the filmic achievements worth noting since the last gathering of the faithful.

Casual attendees may manage to take that notion at face value—after all, they have the option of being even more selective than the festival organizers. Less easily persuaded are those professionally compelled to camp out for the duration in the wooded expanses of Alice Tully Hall. The conditions under which they toil aren't exactly conducive to swoons of excitement. For two weeks, they endure 10 a.m. press screenings, which are spent prying eyelids apart, scribbling illegible notes on spiral pads, and balancing clandestine coffee containers out of the range of the laser-beam

flashlights aimed by the hall's employees (trained to view the press as only a tad less sneaky than the crowd you'd encounter on Rikers' Island).

Yet the disaffection among many of these film journalists is more than simple battle fatigue. After the third or fourth tongue-clucking, talking-head documentary with the guts to come right out and tell us that mental patients mustn't be mistreated, or that the dastardly KKK must be squelched, on top of the opening-night enshrinement of *Charlots of Fire*, that starved-collar *Rocky*, a few doubts about the selection process begin to dawn. Francesco Rosi's *Tre Fratelli*, both a rueful celebration of human continuity and a despairing vision of Italy's current political morass, was the most completely satisfying film I've seen from any quarter this year. After its Cannes premiere, it was offered to the New York Festival, which evidently found it somehow wanting—unlike, say, Antonioni's *Il Mistero di Oberwald*, which turns a second-rate Cocteau play (*L'Aigle à Deux Têtes*) into a fifth-rate Hammer horror film with a pretentious color scheme (pistachio faces, electric-yellow landscapes). *Tighten Your Belts*,

Bite the Bullet—a shrill and static lecture (and I do mean lecture) on the pernicious role of the banks in the recent fiscal crises in Cleveland and New York—would scarcely have passed muster in a PBS Sunday-afternoon slot opposite ABC's "Wide World of Sports." So what in the world was it doing in a prominent berth at Lincoln Center?

Two of this year's direst entries shared at least one discernible function—to play up to the rarefied, vicarious groupiedom that thrives in New York like nowhere else I can think of. Instead of rockers from Styx, the objects of this brand of adulation are *recherché* artistes with a taste for martyrdom and a flair for self-promotion. Both Wim Wenders's *Lightning over Water* and Louis Malle's *My Dinner with Andre* packed a double whammy: Not only did they focus on sure-fire subjects for this sort of cultural beatification, but each was directed by a film maker with unimpeachable claims to idolatry.

Lightning over Water pays tribute to Nicholas Ray, or more accurately, to Wenders's own tender reverence for the benighted director of *Rebel without a Cause*, here captured (trapped?) in the last agonies of his bout with terminal cancer. Narrated by Wenders in a terse, tough-guy mode possibly induced by too many viewings of Philip Marlowe films, *Lightning over Water* is a self-important exploitation movie. Avidly lingering over Ray's emaciated features



My Dinner with Andre

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